

SENATE EDUCATION

EXHIBIT NO. 5

DATE 1-12-2009

BILL NO. 81

Honorable Chairman & members of the committee,

My name is Becky Stockton & I reside in Helena, Montana & I am in favor of SB 81 for the following reasons.

As in present law, the Board of Public Education members that are appointed by the governor are not accountable to anyone. The change in this bill to have the board members elected would give the taxpayers & parents more control over their schools by electing qualified individuals into these positions instead of by the controlling party that holds the governor's position. Right now the Board of Education is running the school system with no accountability to the taxpayer or the parent.

Most parents & taxpayers probably do not know that this board exists, what they do & that they make the policy for the public schools. I am not sure what they actually do. This bill would put in the forefront what this board does with the taxpayer's money & what policies they are passing down to the school districts; in other words transparency & openness. This would enable the taxpayers & parents to be more involved in the student's education.

In 2005, there was a bill before the legislature called the Bullying bill & Senator Sam Kitzenberg carried it. It was a very hot bill because it was classifying certain groups in the school system to have more protection than other students. At first the Board of Public Education was not in support of the bill & then in the end supported it & said that they would look into making policy on it. After the bill failed, groups lobbied the Board of Education to pass it. My understanding there was three hearings, but it wasn't until the last one that I heard about it & I made a point to go & testified on the Bullying policy in January 2006. The policy passed & is in the school system. I am not sure what the policy says or if each local school district has a choice of developing their own policy. I brought this to the attention to the committee because the majority of taxpayers & parents have no idea that policy for the school districts are being made at this level with no accountability and that there is little or no parent involvement in the process. Also they superseded the legislative & the people's will when the legislative body voted the bill down that session.

I would also like to recommend to the committee how we should go about electing these qualified members for the Board of Education. Presently, we have the PSC divided into 5 regions. Why couldn't we use the same 5 regions to select the board members? It would save the taxpayers money & the legislator's time from doing a legislative study & could easily be included in an election ballot.

I ask that you please vote "Yes" on SB 81.

Becky Stockton
1430 Boston Rd.
Helena, MT. 59602 - 449-3670

Becky Stockton

Honorable Chairman & members of the committee, my name is Becky Stockton & I reside in Helena, Montana.

I am in total support of SB 80 and having the Board of Regents elected by the taxpayers of Montana. As I understand this bill & reading some other information that this board is not accountable to anyone in this state. If this is approved by the committee & put to the vote of the people; the voters will have an opportunity to make their voices heard by electing qualified individuals to these positions. This way the Board of Regents are held accountable to the taxpayers & would then have to have all their expenditures, policies & etc. available to the public. This would bring in more transparency & openness regarding this board that runs our university system.

I am not very familiar with this board except that I have heard them testify at legislative hearings for or against school issues. Since I am not very familiar with the board & the powers they have, then I can assume that most taxpayers in the state of Montana don't even know that this board exists. In fact, I don't even know what individuals are on the board at the present time.

I have one recommendation on the procedure of electing these board members for the Board of Regents, why can't we use the same system we use for the PSC (Public Service Commission) to elect these individuals. The system is already in place, so no money or study commission would have to be established to pay for this. Also this way of doing it, we would have equal representation around the state by rural & city voters as to what they would like to see done in our university system.

Thank you for time today & I ask that you vote "Yes" on SB 80.

Becky Stockton
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